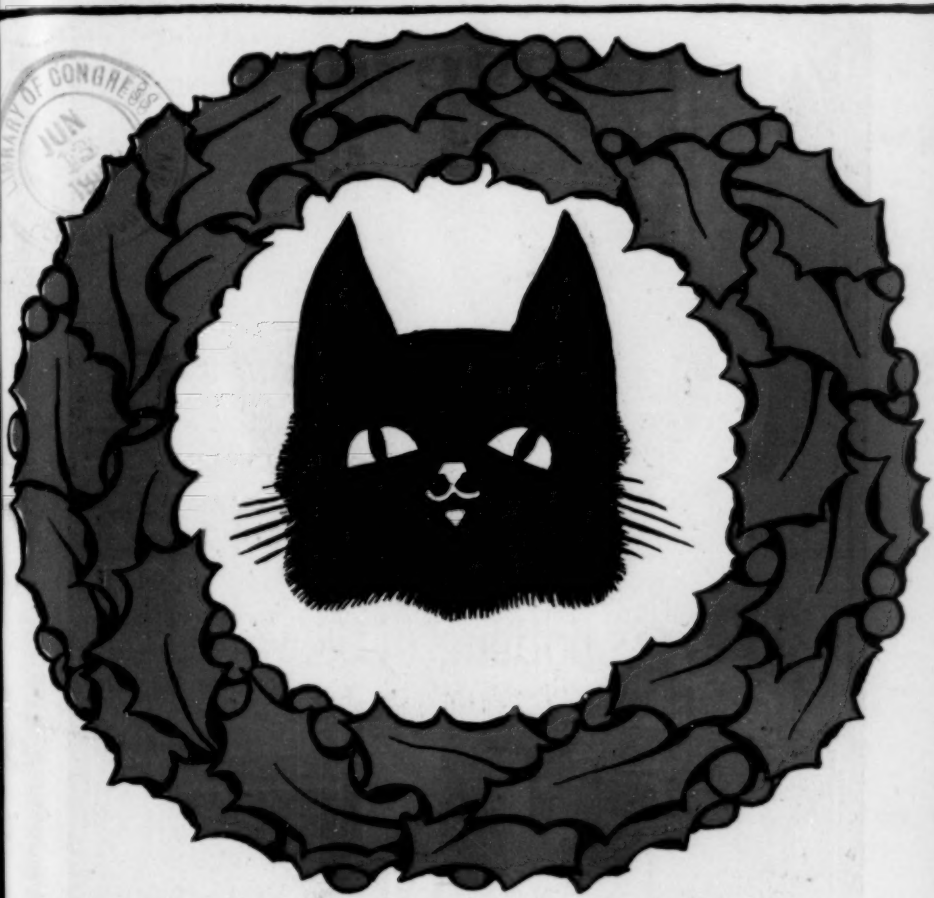
The Black Cat



DECEMBER 1906

Even Unto the End
Richard Barker Shelton

The Rainbow Box $150 Prize
Jessie McFarland Penfield

Old Dan's Tussle
Louis De Lanier

The Gate of Society
Lola Diffin Wangner

In the Dark Scene
John Trask

A Lizard's Love
Walter F. McEntire

Price 5 Cents

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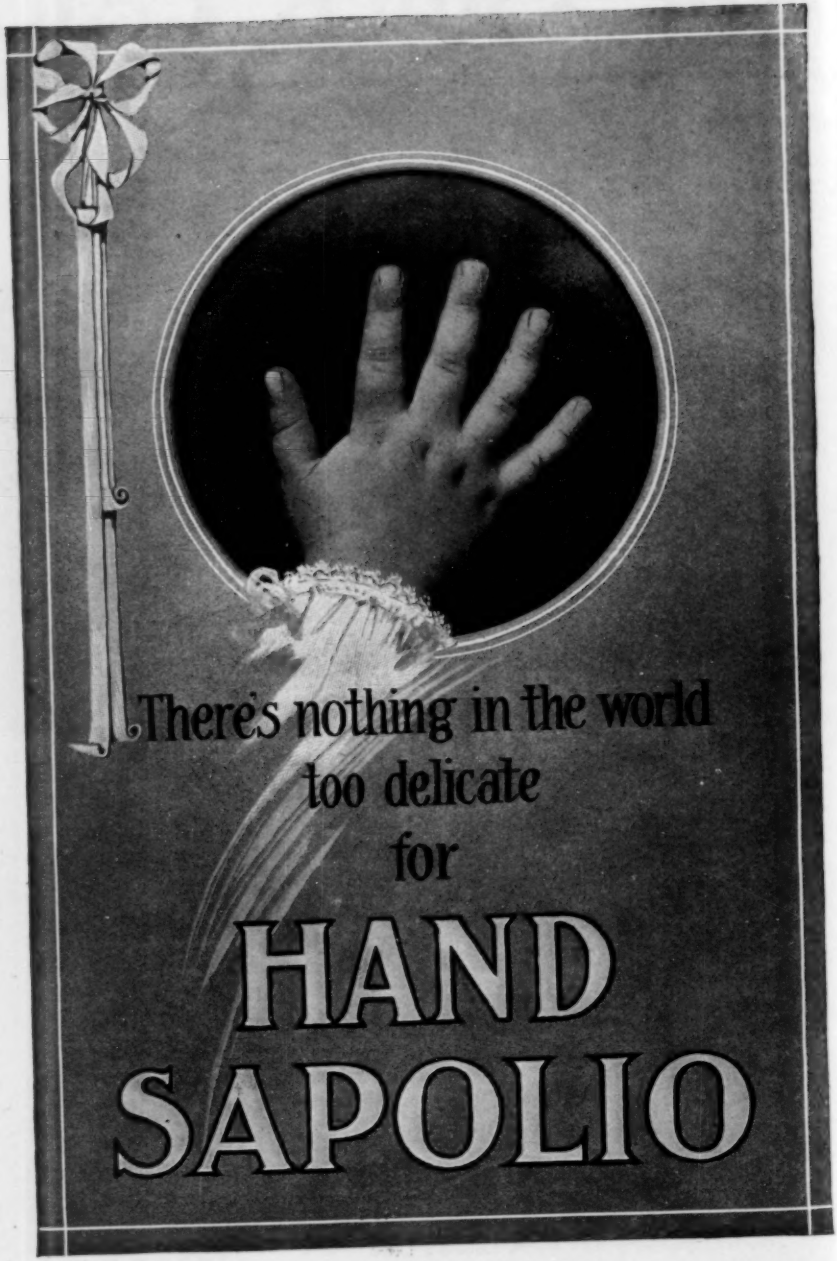
There's nothing in the world
too delicate
for
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SAPOLIO

The Black Cat

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Even Unto The End.*

BY RICHARD BARKER SHELTON.

THE heavy baggage-wagon bumped along the road through the gathering darkness with a great rattling of dry wheel spokes and many creaking complaints from the rusty, sagging springs. Between the shafts an old white horse plodded on stoically, with never a change of gait save at the infrequent hills, which he took at a snail-pace walk. Occasionally he stumbled, and whenever he did so, he was jerked sharply to his feet by the woman who drove the clumsy equipage. She supplemented every tug at the reins with perfunctory cluckings ending in a nasal "gid-ap."

At the rougher portions of the road, where the jolting was more frequent and more severe, she turned in her seat to glance anxiously at the long pine box which rested in the body of the wagon. Once when the wheels bumped over an unusually large stone and the box went clattering against the side of the wagon, she gave a sharp little cry, as if of physical pain.

The sky was overcast with thin clouds which grudgingly opened now and then to show a cluster of feeble, milky stars. By the

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swampy places along the roadway fireflies kindled their winking points of light. An occasional whippoorwill uttered its plaintive note; tireless frogs croaked incessantly. But the woman on the rough board seat of the baggage-wagon sat stiffly erect, blind to the beauties of the night, deaf to its many voices. Her eyes peered through the darkness in a vain effort to pick out the smoothest part of the road; her ears heard nothing save the scraping of the pine box as it shifted about in the wagon behind her.

For an hour she drove on stolidly, now over low hills, now through level meadows; now past groups of cheerfully lighted houses, now through patches of woods where the branches sighed dolefully in the wisp of breeze. The darkness deepened; the stars shone through the clouds with less frequency; the damp air threatened momentary rain. But always she had an eye for the road; always an ear for the box.

At length she was aware of the sound of hoofbeats, rapidly approaching. There was a whir of wheels and a light buggy pulled up beside her. A gruff voice called through the darkness: "Abby! That you, Abby?"

"Yes, it's me," she said in a colorless voice.

"Where you been?" the voice went on with some vexation. "You've worried us most to death. We been lookin' for you ever since sundown."

She did not reply at once. "Who's with you?" she asked.

"It's John," the same voice answered. "We been drivin' all over creation tryin' to find you."

"You git out, an' git in here with me," she said. Her own voice startled her. It was hard and rasping. A man climbed out of the buggy, after which, it turned and sped down the road. She was aware the man had mounted the seat beside her and that they were alone — they and the box.

"Where you been?" he was asking again.

She clucked to the horse and turned to him defiantly.

"I took my own horse an' harness," she said. "I'm sorry I had to borry *your* wagon."

"That ain't answerin' me. Where you been?" he persisted.

She jerked her head towards the box. "I been after Tom," she said simply.

Her husband caught his breath. She half expected he would strike her. She braced herself for the blow.

"You don't mean to tell me you've been *there!*" he cried.

"Yes, I've been *there*," she answered without emotion. "I got there jest before dark. They was all real good to me. The warden, he's a fine man, an' so's the sheriff. He wanted to send one of his deputies home with me, but I wouldn't have it. They was some young fellers there that was real nice, too. One of 'em talked with me an' I told him all about Tom an' how he used to be before he left home, an' another of 'em took some pictures of me an' the wagon. That was while I was waitin' for 'em to bring out the box. I guess it was for the newspapers probably."

The man beside her groaned. "Ain't it bad enough, I should like to know," he burst out, "without your goin' an' doin' this. Ain't there disgrace enough already without your addin' to it?"

"I s'pose you think I care," she said. "Well, I don't. I don't care about nothin' now I've brought Tom back. *You* didn't darst do it. You'd 'a' let 'em bury him like a pauper. You was afraid to show your face there an' let 'em know who you was, because he'd been hung on a gallows. I — *warn't.*"

"He ain't nothin' to me," the man said angrily. "I disowned him years ago. He's no son of mine."

The woman said nothing. She moved as far as possible to her end of the seat and urged the horse forward. Her husband leaned over and tried to take the reins, but she held them out of reach.

"You let 'em alone. I'm drivin'," she said sharply, and, to her amazement, he meekly obeyed.

They came to a fork in the road and the woman turned the horse into the left branch. The man eyed her curiously.

"Where you goin' now?" he asked.

"To the cemetery," she replied.

Presently they reached the bleak little country burying-ground. The man got down from his seat and swung open the iron gate. The woman drove through and up the path, her husband following. She drew up before a lot with a single new-made grave on it.

"Who's lot's this?" he demanded.

"Mine," she said. "I sold the spoons mother left me, to get it, an' I had Jim Bell dig the grave this afternoon while I was gone."

She fumbled beneath the seat and found a lantern. This she lighted, and, climbing from the wagon, set it on the ground.

"Take hold of one end of that box," she commanded her husband. "I'll take hold of the other end."

"You can't," he objected.

"Take hold as I tell you," she repeated.

The box was lifted slowly from the wagon, the woman staggering beneath its weight. They stumbled across the lot to the side of the open grave.

"Set it down now," she panted. "Careful, oh, careful!"

Gently it rested on the earth. The woman straightened up painfully, gasping for breath. She stood silently beside the man, her head bowed.

"Will you offer a prayer?" she said at length.

He hesitated.

"You're glib enough at class-meetin'," she taunted scornfully.

Still he hesitated.

"Then, if *you* won't, take off your hat an' kneel down!"

She felt a dull surprise that he again obeyed her. Heretofore *she* had always done the obeying. Side by side they knelt on the damp earth, and the woman began the Lord's Prayer.

"Our Father, Which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name."

Her voice broke. She seemed about to give way to a paroxysm of grief, but after a moment she controlled herself and went on bravely to the end:

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

After a time they rose together silently. The woman turned:

"Jim said he'd leave a coil of rope here," she said. "See anything of it?"

He fumbled about a moment.

"Here 'tis," he said, and passed it to her.

"Fasten it to the two ends of the box," she bade him. "We'll lower it into the grave."

"You can't," he said again, but nevertheless he made the knots.

Then slowly, carefully, and, for the woman, most painfully, the box was lowered. She knelt down again and with her bare hands threw in the loose gravel until the box was covered. The man

stood by, watching dully. After a time she arose and turned away.

The man backed the team and beckoned. "Git in," he said.

She shrank from him. "I ain't goin' with *you*," she said.

"Ain't goin'!" he repeated. "Why not? Ain't it enough for him to disgrace an' dishonor me without your doin' it, too?"

She drew herself up with blazing eyes.

"'Twarn't his fault," she cried hotly. "You drove him to it. You worked him to death an' ground him down till he run away. Then, when he wrote you he was sick an' in trouble, you said, 'let him find his own way out,' an' when you heard he was goin' wrong you never stretched out a hand to him. You turned your back on him. I ain't goin' back with *you*! There's blood on every acre of that land of yours, an' blood on everything else you've got! *He* ain't so bad as you are, to my mind. He killed a man's body, but you killed his soul years ago! O Tom! O Tom! O my God!!"

He took a step towards her. "You come with me," he said, but she slipped past him and vanished into the night, running on and on until her breath was gone and her knees sank beneath her.

. . . . . .

The early morning train had just left the Craigville station. It was bowling across the marshlands which stretched away bare and brown in the mist.

In the rear car the conductor stopped before a woman who sat gazing steadfastly out of a window at a dreary landscape.

"Tickets, please!" he suggested mildly.

The woman made no movement, but continued to stare vacantly at the melancholy marshes. At a sharp repetition of the man's demand she slowly turned a face from which all sign of reason had fled, and muttered:

"I ain't got no ticket."

"Then I'll take your fare. Where are you going?"

A strange light leaped to the weary eyes, and the thin lips drew tensely, as the answer came evenly:

"To hell — where Tom is."

The Rainbow Box.*

BY JESSIE McFARLAND PENFIELD.

ALL day the rain had fallen and all night; and the gray, chill dawn of a new day brought only the continued rain. All over the low, flat prairie, the water stood, covering the hoofs of the cattle which had gathered about near the chaparral and stood with backs to the north and heads held low, for it was spring; and Texas northers, because they come late, are none the less cold and cutting. The man and woman, riding slowly along in the creaking old buggy, looked out on the scene with dull, emotionless eyes; and the tired little horse appeared to look not at all, but splashed on blindly.

The little woman, drawing a long breath, turned and put her hand on an iron box, little larger than a shoe-box, on the seat beside her. She touched it as if to make sure it was there. Clumsily, yet gently, the man put his big hand over hers:

"Cold, honey?" he said.

"Naw," was all she said, but the eyes that she turned again to the wet, wind-swept plains were tender with happiness; for, in the past few months of their one year's married life he had forgotten the caresses and endearing little names that had made her life as a wife so sweet in the beginning. And now he was remembering again!

Together, they rode on in silence until they had left the grassy open and were in the road.

"Think we'll get there in time?" she asked.

"Hope so," he said, "this was writ yistiddy;" and taking a note from his pocket, he read aloud, as he had already done three times this morning:

"DEAR BOB: Better come quick. Granny can't live much longer.

"Your lovin' sister,

"ALICE.

"P. S.—Be sure to bring the Rainbow box."

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"Pore granny!" the woman said. "It ain't been more'n four days since she left us for a little pleasure-visit, an' here she is a-dyin'." Then, as her thoughts recurred to the postscript:

"How did you ever come t' call this 'ere the Rainbow box, Bob?"

"Well," said Bob, leaning forward with outstretched arm, as he rapped the horse with the short, broken whip, "it was this er way: About three year ago the school-teacher was boardin' at our house an' she noticed I was always settin' aroun' an' not a-doin' much. 'Don't yer work?' she says. 'Yes,' I says, 'sometimes.' Cousin Jane was settin' there, mean as ever. 'He thinks he don't have ter work,' she says. 'He thinks Granny 'll leave him the box,' she says. 'What box?' the school-teacher says, an' then Cousin Jane, she up an' told all about it; how as Granny locked it up before we was born an' is a-goin' ter leave it ter the one as treats her better nor the rest; how as we don't know for sure what's in it, but we know it's all right an' Granny hints it's gold; how as we've all quarreled over it an' I'm 'fraid that if I leave home ter get work, Granny 'll turn her likin' ter some o' the others; how as Jim hates me wuss'n pizen 'cause Granny hints I'm the one as'll get the box.

"The school-teacher kept er settin' there a-lookin' at me. She was queerlike, all the time readin' a book or writin' when she wasn't keepin' school. She kept a-lookin' at me. After while she says: 'Have yer ever heard of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?' she says. 'Yes,' says me and Cousin Jane together. 'Well,' she says, 'whether it be a pot or a box or whatever, if yer wastes yer time an' opportunities a-tryin' for just one thing for yerself an' forget everybody else, yer'll miss the best in life,' she says; an' she talked on a long time about life an' the rainbow an' such. She talked pretty, the school-teacher did. Bein' particular-like about house-cleanin', she soon left us an' boarded over to Mis' Hawkins. We got ter callin' it the Rainbow box then an' somehow we just kept it up."

"That sounds like as if the school-teacher didn't believe there was anything in the box," said the little woman, her youthful face and tender brown eyes taking on an anxious look.

"School-teacher don't know everything," answered Bob.

"But s'pose there ain't anything in it."

"But there is."

"But s'pose if there is, she goes an' gives it to Jim."

"O Jinnie, hush!"

"Well, Bob, if anything happens ter keep yer from gettin' the box right away — if Granny don't die or something like that — ain't yer goin' ter drive cattle an' try ter make something ever ergin?"

"'Tend ter yer own business," said Bob, his face flushing angrily.

Jennie, hurt and surprised, drew her breath quickly. She found his first harsh words harder to bear than all the months of his forgetfulness of little kindnesses. She would explain that she had not meant to bring to mind the money she had sewed so hard all winter to get and then had so freely given him. He would be sorry then. She would tell him ——

"Bob, I ——"

"Shut yer mouth," said Bob, "all the time talkin' ag'in that box an' everybody knows that's all yer married me for."

Her delicate, white face grew whiter, her lips ashen. Had he always believed this of her? How she despised that box! But for it, Bob would have worked like other good men, independently and honestly, for every dollar he got. It had caused him to treat her unfairly, and because he had treated her unfairly, he was suspicious and believed she was taunting him with it.

The wind was rising and the rain beat hard against the thin back curtains of the dilapidated little buggy. They had reached Coyote Creek, that usually placid little stream, now so deep and swift. Without a moment's hesitation, Bob drove boldly in. The little horse plunged and pulled; Bob, leaning forward, beat him with broken whip and called to him to go on.

Jennie sat, white and silent, looking down on the fast-flowing water. Then she looked at the iron box on the seat beside her and quickly, as if it had been a dangerous thing and to touch it were harmful, she lifted it; and though the veins and cords in her little hands seemed about to break, she threw it from her, out into the foaming water where it sank down and away from her sight forever.

With body still bent forward and whip poised in the air, Bob turned his head and looked at her, his eyes blazing with anger. In after years, when living through this day again, he always wondered why, as he looked at her, the thought had come to him of her clasping him in her arms and jumping with him, out somewhere, where they would sink down together; for she looked so little as she sat there, erect, her hands pressing tightly against each other, her dark eyes meeting his fearlessly.

Turning again, he let the whip fall on its accustomed place on the back of the frightened, straining animal; but the anger on his face had given place to a look of wonder.

They reached the other bank of the creek safely and, without another word, drove the remaining two miles, stopping before a hut that stood in one of the outer yards of a big ranch house. The door of the hut opened and a woman holding a man's "slicker" over her head ran out to meet them. She came close before she spoke.

"Yer'r too late. Granny's just died," she said in a loud whisper. "She left yer the Rainbow box, Bob. Where is it?"

Bob climbed stiffly down from the buggy.

"Didn't yer bring it?" the woman continued.

"Naw," said Bob, leaning heavily against the wheel and looking like one dazed.

"I wrote ter yer ter. Why didn't yer?"

Bob opened his lips twice before speaking. "I'll go back for it."

"When?"

"Soon as I can get off from here." Then, with bowed head, he walked slowly to the house.

Jennie watched him silently, her eyes big with unshed tears, her heart crying out for his forgiveness for the great wrong she had done him. Once they were in the crowded little house, there was no chance for a word with him, and the morning dragged itself by.

When dinner was ended and the men, still seated at the table, had tilted back their chairs for the long after-dinner talk of their own brave deeds and great fortunes that had barely escaped them, Bob rose abruptly and left. Jennie, whose eyes had hardly left him since their arrival, watched him from the window as he caught

Granny's old gray horse and mounted him bare-backed. Then, as he rode slowly down the black, muddy road and the rain had almost hidden him from sight, her longing to run after him and tell him she was sorry, to beg him to forget her rash deed and to love her again became greater; and her regret, unbearable. And now she knew where he was going — he would go to the creek and dive for the Rainbow box! She knew that every hour marked a greater rise in the creek, and, in her excited, feverish imagination, she could see him drowning as he tried to rescue the box. Snatching up the little shawl she had worn around her shoulders she opened the door and, in a moment more, was out on the wet grass beside the big road, running swiftly in the face of the wind, jumping from knoll to knoll, and calling wildly to her husband to stop — to wait — to come to her.

Seeing that she could neither make him hear nor overtake him, she stood still for a moment, straining her eyes in the mist and rain. He would stay in the road going around the bend. Turning quickly, she took the cut across the prairie to the creek-crossing, praying as she ran that she might reach it first.

The rain beat in her face and the wind wrapped her skirts roughly about her. The long morning drive in the cold had been wearisome and weakening. The fresh, keen pain of regret never yet produced an appetite for dinner, and since early dawn she had had no taste of food. Running still, she grew strangely thirsty and opened her mouth that she might taste the raindrops, which only made her long the more for a long, deep draught of cold water.

Her thirst was becoming greater. She felt annoyed that she could breathe no faster and that her chest rose and fell so slowly. She loosened the little shawl from her head, letting it fall to the ground, and found some relief as the cold wind blew through her hair and on her heated neck.

On and on she ran, hot, panting, sobbing dry, tearless sobs, on and on until she had almost reached the crossing, when a roaring sound filled her ears. It was the creek, she thought, rising faster, and her fear for Bob changed to terror; with a new strength, born of an agony of distress, she ran until, at last, she stood beside the creek, gazing down on the dark banks and between them on what

looked like gray, colorless sky; for she could see but dimly. The rain — or was it the mist before her eyes — was blinding her. The roaring in her ears was deafening now and her head was growing dizzy.

She would find the road and stand there that she might see Bob as he came. She was almost there — now she had reached it — when she staggered, threw out her hands as if to catch at something, and fell. It was not a hard fall, for the rain had made the earth soft, and the cool, wet mud pressed gently against her hot, throbbing cheek. Then she closed her eyes contentedly, for she had reached the road and Bob would find her there.

. . . . . .

One day, when the summer's sun had long shone hot, when the mud in the big road had dried into clods and the clods had changed to dust; when the grass on the prairie was dry and dead and crackled beneath your feet, a little boy, barefooted and mud-splashed, waded about in Coyote Creek, which was now an uneven line of soft mud with an occasional pool of dark, dirty water. The boy carried a stick in his hand and whistled gaily.

Two men, as they rode slowly down the creek-bank, turned their heads and looked at him; as they did, he stopped whistling and bent over something, tugging and pulling as he tried to lift it.

"What you got there, sonny?" asked the smooth-faced man, who wore gloves.

"D'n know," said the boy. Then the riders went over to him and the smooth-faced man spoke again:

"Can't you get down and help him, Jim?"

"I reckon so, Doctor."

And together, the man named Jim and the little boy lifted up what appeared to be a box, or a block of something, nearer oblong than square, and dripping with mud. When they had taken the few steps necessary to place it on firm ground, the little boy danced about: "Oh, it's a box, it's a box. Let's open it!"

Jim, who had once worked as a blacksmith, took from his pocket a big pocket-knife of unusual size, and, with the aid of the stick the boy carried, soon broke the lock and lifted back the lid. The top had fitted securely, keeping out the water, but mould and mildew bore evidence of the dampness that had struck through. Jim

took from the box a small bundle that proved to be four little china plates of fancy, quaint design, wrapped in a towel. Next, there was a miniature of a young man whose dress spoke plainly of days long past. Then he pushed aside a little bundle of letters that he might take up a long, wide purse of cloth, bordered with fringe, and on it was embroidered the name, Ann Eliza Black. Jim read the name and sat staring, wide-eyed and wonder-struck. The doctor's saddle creaked as he leaned forward to look at him. The boy, watching, drew back, afraid.

At last, like one waking from a long sleep, the man named Jim thus spoke:

"This was Granny's box. That was Granny's name. This was the Rainbow box 'at she left to Bob. Bob ain't never been heard from since the day his wife an' Granny was buried. You know, Doctor," he said, turning dazed, wondering eyes up at the man who still watched him, "Bob's wife dropped dead right up there in the road the same day 'at Granny died."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said the doctor.

"Well," said Jim, "after she was buried, the next day, Bob left for the West, we reckon; we don't know where an' it ain't that I care; but why didn' he take this box with him? It was his'n an' he had it at his home. How did it come here?"

As neither the man nor the boy tried to explain the mystery, he continued: "Now this is a blamed fine thing for Granny ter make such a talk about, an' havin' Bob so stuck-up an' actin' so all-fired smart over."

"Don't be hard on the old lady, Jim," the doctor said. "That box held all that was dear to *her*. What is treasured most in the heart is seldom of actual value."

Jim turned out the contents of the purse on the towel in which the plates had been wrapped. There were fifty-five gold dollars and five silver dimes.

Then the doctor spoke again; his tender, generous thoughts had left him: "I tell you, Jim, I had begun to fear that I must put the bill owed me by you and your sisters and brothers for Granny, in the hands of a collector. You know I treated her for her rheumatism through that cold weather which, together with her last illness, brought her bill to fifty-six dollars."

Jim grinned. This was a way to keep Bob from getting the money even if he should return. "Granny's estate don't quite cover her doctor-bill," he said.

"Well, give me fifty-five dollars and I'll call it even," said the doctor.

"All right," answered Jim, as he gave the doctor the money, "an' the fifty-five cents can go to the kid here."

"I don't want your old ghost money," said the little boy, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets and backing away.

"Yer don't!" said Jim, as he climbed up on his horse that was impatiently following the doctor's; "Well, yer got the things out o' the mud there; then throw 'um back where yer got 'um."

And the boy did as he was bade and hurried away.

Old Dan's Tussle.*

BY LOUIS DE LANIER.

AIT a minute," said the Superintendent of Motive Power, "and you'll witness a pleasant little incident."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I'm going to reward a hero. This check for a thousand dollars the directors have voted old Dan; and, furthermore, I'm going to give him charge of the new Mogul we've just turned out of the shops. Every driver on the road is eating his heart out hoping he'll get Number 1200; but after weighing every man's claims thoroughly, I've come to the conclusion nobody's entitled to her but Dan. You knew about his battle with the cyclone, didn't you?"

"Never heard of it."

"Why, I thought everybody read of the dash he made with our 'Limited' into the teeth of a cyclone last month? 'Twas in the papers."

"I didn't see it."

"Well, he'll be here in a minute, and I'll get him to tell you."

At this moment the door opened and a short, slender little old man entered. He carried his cap in his hand; his blue jean overalls and jumper were grimed with oil and cinders and his hands were incased in buckskin gloves, black with use.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he inquired in a respectful, almost timid voice, holding the cap bashfully behind him and bowing awkwardly.

"Yes, Dan, come in."

The little old man came forward and I saw his features more clearly. His face was short and broad, his chin noticeably square. Small, steady gray eyes, set closely together, looked straight at us, and in them I perceived nothing of uneasiness or curiosity.

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"Duty is this man's religion," whispered the Superintendent. "Take a seat, Dan," he said aloud.

The engineer obeyed, but he was obliged to sit on the edge of the chair, in order to let his toes touch the floor. He pulled off his gloves and rolled them up with his cap, holding the bundle in his lap as old women hold their knitting when resting.

"You remember I told you, Dan, that the directors proposed to take some notice of that episode last month?"

The old man squirmed in his seat, dropped his eyes to the floor, fumbled the cap and gloves, a suspicion of a smile beneath his thin, gray moustache.

"I'd rather you hadn't done anything about it, sir. It's all past and gone, and it ain't worth bringing up again. I didn't do anything but my duty. Besides, you know, my fireman — "

Two tears trickled down his cheeks.

"We don't regard it a matter of duty, Dan, for you to tackle cyclones in the open prairie, nor do we reward men for discharging their duty. We pay them for that. What we want to reward you for is bravery, judgment and nerve."

The engineer mumbled something, but the Superintendent continued:

"At the last meeting of the directors it was voted to present you with a check for a thousand dollars; and now I've sent for you to tell you that I'm going to give you the new Mogul, Number 1200."

The gloves and cap dropped to the floor; the dingy hands were clasped over the watering eyes, and the small physique shook with sobs. For a few minutes we watched the emotions of the little old man, and neither of us could restrain a choking sensation that drove mist over our own eyes. After a time the engineer became more composed.

"I'll take Number 1200, sir, and thank you for her with all my heart, and treat her as well as I know how; but the check — I can't take that! My fireman, Joe Colby, lost his life in that affair and left a wife and four children. They must have the check, sir. They need it and it belongs to them. You see, Joe was trying to buy a little home. He'd just gone into the building association, and they'd advanced him a thousand dollars, and he'd only

moved into his cottage a week before. Won't you fix that check, sir, so I can get the money and take it over to Mrs. Colby before I go out on my run? And mayn't I tell her the directors voted it to her Joe?"

As he said this he arose and stepped forward, a look of intense eagerness in his swollen eyes — a beseeching expression — which brought a smile of acquiescence to the face of the superintendent, who was watching him closely.

"Yes, Dan. Put your name on the back of this."

The old man affixed his endorsement to the back of the check while the superintendent touched a bell.

"Take this over to the treasurer's office," he said to the clerk who responded, "and bring me the bills. Sit down, Dan, for a few minutes, and I'll have it for you. You never detailed the affair to me," he added for my benefit.

"Well, it happened this way," began the engineer, crossing one short leg over the other and catching a heel in the rung of the chair: "We got away from Page's Junction on time, hauling a baggage car, two coaches, a diner, and two parlors. It was exactly 3.10 when I got the word and pulled her out in the regular way for the straight run of eighteen miles to Gage's. It was as bright and clear an afternoon as I ever saw. The irons stretched out like two pencil lines across a sheet of paper, coming together at the horizon and then dwindling down to nothing. You've noticed that stretch of track a thousand times, sir? We'd taken plenty of water at Ballou's, and had coal enough; everything was well oiled, no jar, no wind to speak of, no dust of any consequence. Joe and I'd been joking while we hung up at Page's for the down local, and we were in jolly good humor. The train pulled steady, and it wasn't too hot nor too cold. I got Number 44 up to her gauge and settled back on my seat for the prettiest spin we have. In fact I make it a rule to "show off" a little when I get on that race track, as we call it, and it was one of those times, you know, when a fellow kind o' feels as if things was running too all-fired smooth to last. Now, I couldn't tell you for my life just where we were when I noticed what seemed like a flurry of dust away ahead, about ten miles. It was about as much dust as one o' them cavalry companies kicks up when they cross us a bit above what we

call Granny's Climb. I didn't think enough of it to mention it to Joe, for I really suspected it was one o' them soldier troops going to or from the fort. Then I noticed a great mass o' clouds, the color of sheet iron and about as glossy-like, rise right up back of the horizon. I spoke to Joe of it and asked what he thought it meant. He replied he guessed we were going to have a gust. But those clouds climbed up so fast that in ten minutes we couldn't see any sun at all and it grew powerful dark. We were running about thirty miles an hour, for I hadn't got her well opened up for speed then. I slowed down and stepped out on to the footboard. It seemed to be getting hot and dry, and the brush alongside the road was turned leaves-back.

"'We're going to get it mighty heavy, Pap, and we're going to get it quick,' said Joe as he flung on some coal.

"I didn't make him any answer. I felt queer. Something was warning me. It kept getting darker, but there was no wind, no rain, no thunder. I climbed back on to my seat and pulled her open a bit. Old 44 shook herself and jumped ahead. Joe got back on to his seat and leaned out, looking ahead. Then I saw a whitish, ragged sort of a cloud drop down from the black ones. It was bigger at the top than it was at the bottom, and the lower part of it was swishing the track like the end of a whiplash.

"'Cyclone!' exclaimed Joe.

"The same thought crossed my mind. It was right over the track, licking the irons with its great gray tongue. It flashed through my head that cyclones travel in certain directions, but for my life I couldn't remember what their course was. In fact, I didn't have time to think, for it was headed straight for us and coming faster every minute.

"We've an understanding in our crew that when there's anything going to happen to the train, and I see it, I give five short, quick blows on the whistle. Quick as lightning I made up my mind to tackle that cyclone! I'd put the train's strength against its strength! If I came to a standstill I knew I'd be just as bad off as if I crowded her through it. So I yelled to Joe for coal and for him to close the cab windows; then I blew five short whistles, threw the lever away forward and grabbed the throttle and pulled her open. By this time I could hear the roar coming nearer and

nearer, like continual thunder! It was so terrific I couldn't hear the noise of the train. Old 44 gave her head a toss and jumped forward! Seemed to me she never gritted her teeth and acted so determined before, and I hung on to the throttle as tight as I could and tugged it a little every instant until we met the great whirling, hissing, howling, swinging, sweeping tongue!

"As we sprung into it it roared like the hissing of a million valves letting off steam! In the din and uproar I didn't know a thing, except that I had my hand on old 44's bits and she was a-plunging like an unruly horse! She unseated me like a bucking pony! I hung on! It was all I could do.

"When we tore out into the sunlight again I was behind the boiler, on the floor of the cab, hanging on to that throttle! The cab was gone! Joe was gone! My cap was gone, and my jumper torn as if a thresher had run through it! The coal was cleaned completely out of the tender, the roof of the baggage car was swept away, the roofs of the two coaches driven up into the air and half ripped off, and the end of one of the parlors punched in!

"*But we were still on the irons, thank God!*

"Then I broke down! Yes, sir, I went to pieces like a woman! I flumped down on the floor of the cab and shook and couldn't speak! The passengers came running forward, after I'd brought her down to a dead stand, asking all sorts of questions. But I couldn't have answered one of 'em to have saved my life. All I could do was to gasp: 'Where's Joe? Find Joe!' I knew we were safe, that it had all passed, but what had it cost us? They went back and looked for Joe, and found him blown at least a quarter of a mile from the road, face down in the sand. He had had the breath actually blown out of him!"

"But you knew you'd saved your train?" broke in the Superintendent.

"Yes, I knew that, but I couldn't have told you how, nor why. Some scientific men have told me since that what I did saved the lives of all my passengers. Scientific reasons don't cut much ice with me, though. It just came to me that I'd got to fight that cyclone, and I called on old 44 to fight it and she did; and now she's over in the roundhouse, her days of usefulness over!"

The clerk entered with the money.

"I'm going to take this right away to Joe's widow!" exclaimed the little old man, stowing the bills in the breast pocket of his jumper. "Then I'll go around and fire up the Mogul and get her ready for my run. Thank you, Mr. Superintendent," he added, a tremor in his voice, as he turned to depart, "I hope none o' the boys'll feel hurt because I was preferred to them."

"That's all right, Dan. You're the man to have her, and all the boys'll be glad you've got her."

"Thank you, sir. Won't you and your friend come down and see me pull out? I leave at 12.10, you know."

"Yes, we'll come."

The old man smiled and waved his hand as he hurried away.

We went down into the train house at noon. The huge locomotive was already hooked to the train of parlors, bright, glistening, a monstrous hulk of panting power; old Dan bustling about in a clean suit of jeans, rubbing, oiling, chatting like a boy with a new toy. The conductor sang out "All aboard!" Old Dan leaped on to the footboard and clambered up to the lofty seat in the high cab perched over the enormous driving-wheels. His hand grasped the long lever. The conductor waved his hand and, a brakeman pulling the starting whistle, the bell clanged. Old Dan flung the lever forward, gave a tug at the throttle, and the massive Mogul began her maiden trip.

"Watch, now!" said the Superintendent, "how popular old Dan is. The other engineers down there in the roundhouse will salute him as he goes by with his new machine."

The heavy train increased its speed and when it approached the roundhouse the whistles of all the idle locomotives blared forth their salutation and "Godspeed!" The last we heard was the hoarse whistle of the Mogul as old Dan returned the greetings of his comrades.

The Gate of Society.*

BY LOLA DIFFIN WANGNER.

PATTING his gloved hands in self-satisfaction, Dr. Haden turned at the door.

"She will get along nicely now, Mr. Carson," he said. "You have no cause for worry,—none at all. Only a little over-worked, moving and—er—not that I mean to say she had any of the work to do—ha! ha!—no," looking smilingly around at the elegantly appointed rooms, "but women shoulder the responsibilities of such things even when unnecessary, you know, and—she'll be all right in a few days. I will call again tomorrow to see how she is progressing."

Mr. Carson bowed: "Thank you, Doctor. We are strangers here, as you know,—no one to turn to. You've cheered us up wonderfully. I thank you."

Something in his manner made Dr. Haden, club man and society man though he was, feel ill-bred beside him.

"I'm lucky to have been called in," he said to himself, as he left the stately old house.

Left alone, the dark-haired man walked slowly down the hall. Pausing in front of a costly bronze, he took a flat book from his pocket.

"Five visits at about twenty each,—cheap! One hundred from —" he consulted his book, "leaves —" he jotted down some figures. Then he smiled oddly and passed into the library.

As Dr. Haden was leaving one afternoon, he turned to the fragile little woman in the deep lounging chair.

"Mrs. Haden hopes that you will feel able to see her soon. We don't want you to be a stranger here with us any longer than you wish."

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"I shall be glad, indeed, to meet your wife." She looked up smilingly into the Doctor's thin, well-bred face.

"Delicate as a cameo," he thought, as he looked at her critically. Her husband followed him out of the room.

"If you will kindly step in here, Doctor —" He led the way into a room fitted up as an office. The Doctor noted, with the eye of a connoisseur, the rich old mahogany desk and chairs and the Persian rugs on the floor. "I find it altogether impossible to get away from business, much as I wish to," he waved his hand in an apologetic way about the room, "so I have had this place fitted up. Some day I hope to turn the key in its lock and stay out of it." He looked up smilingly from the desk where he had seated himself. "And now your bill, Doctor." He took the flat book from his pocket. "No," as the other protested, "I never allow a bill to run, — doctor or grocer, it's all one. What's the amount, please?" His tone was sharp and business-like.

Again, the Doctor felt ill-pleased with himself.

"If you insist —" he became professional at once. "Let me see, — five visits at — ten dollars each —"

"It has been worth double that to me."

The Doctor looked at the check. It was for one hundred dollars. Passing alone down the stairs, he took time to note the rich rugs, the exquisite hangings, the wealth everywhere in evidence. He turned and remounted the stairs.

"Mr. Carson," his tone was full of cordiality, "I came back to ask a favor of you." He smiled genially as he used the word favor. "I would esteem it a pleasure to present your name at the Club tomorrow night — the Country Club, you know. You will find its members men of standing. You will like them, I feel sure."

"It is kind of you, Doctor, very kind to do this for me — a stranger."

He looked keenly at the man before him; there was an almost imperceptible accent on his last word. Dr. Haden felt uncomfortable. What was there about this man to make him feel always that he had done an ill-bred thing!

"The kindness lies in your becoming one of us, if you will." He tried to equal the other's manner. "We hold an Assembly

next week, — for members and their wives, you know. It will give us all an opportunity of meeting you and Mrs. Carson."

"You put us under deep obligations, Doctor. I thank you, for both my wife and myself."

He walked to the front door with the Doctor and let him out himself. He smiled cynically as he slowly walked down the hall. The smile deepened as he passed the butler.

"Er — John, you have been with me — how long?"

"One month, sir." An anxious look flashed across the man's face.

"And the others came when you did — twenty of them, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, just to remember the day, divide this among you."

The astonished butler looked at the bills in his hand. There were two hundred dollars.

By night, the news had spread to Dr. Haden's coachman. By morning, the Hon. David Andrews' wife had heard it from her maid. By noon, the story had somehow reached the Club. In his library, Mr. Carson was entering some figures in his flat book. The cynical smile had grown into a sneer.

"A call from the Doctor's fashionable wife, an invitation to the Club, an introduction to the city's inner circle, — one hundred dollars! Cheaper than one's servants!" He laughed aloud; then he slowly mounted the stairs. At the top, he turned and surveyed the handsome hall below him.

"A little tinsel pays well." Again he laughed; then he softly entered his wife's room.

"And after the Assembly ball, little woman, and the city has called, shall we give a something ourselves, eh? How would it do," he looked at her affectionately, "to have a literary evening with — say — Shaw to read?"

"But, Robert, would he come, that famous man?"

"Leave him to me, little woman, he'll come."

Mr. Carson stood in his office with his flat book in his hand. In the ballroom above were gathered those who made up the city's aristocracy. Bertram Shaw was to read from his new book. It was a literary treat. But the thought in most of their minds was the price that must have been given to secure this noted man.

Mr. Carson patted his book musingly.

"Fifteen hundred from — " he smiled, "leaves —" he nodded his head as he put down some figures. "So cheap — so very cheap. Now, how to let them know!"

The evening was over. The whole beautiful home had been thrown open. Every room and dimly lighted alcove had been scanned, critically, approvingly. So had the host and his delicate wife. Society had pronounced them good. It had noted the costly old family silver, the rare collection of pewter. Few families could boast of such real heirlooms, such ancestry. Society worships at such shrines.

Mr. Carson was talking with the noted author. His eyes followed a figure as it stepped into a deep window embrasure. His odd smile crept about his mouth.

"Mr. Shaw — er — will you step over to that alcove with me? I have something to say."

The alcove was unlighted, save by the glare from the long drawing-room.

"I — that is — you have given us real pleasure tonight, Mr. Shaw. Will you accept this in addition to the check I first sent you? Fifteen hundred is very little for the enjoyment you have given us. No protest — I won't allow it."

They left the alcove. The man within it had listened involuntarily. Fifteen hundred for a chapter or two! Bernard Ingalls, broker, left the window. In one-half hour, the amount was known at the farthest end of the rooms.

"So easily done," sneered Robert Carson as the whisper floated to him.

Not in years had society known so charming an addition to its numbers. At the Club, the polished, dark-haired man never lacked for listeners. Keen of wit and broad of view, he had seen much and told it well. He was the most popular man in the Club. At the end of six months, he was one of its directors.

After one of the directors' meetings, Bernard Ingalls, broker, saw an open letter lying on the floor. He examined it. It was to Robert T. Carson. That did not prevent his reading it. So! That was where his great wealth came from, — that wealth of which he never spoke! He was connected with the Standard Oil!

And he was to find enclosed check for seventy-five thousand, — quarterly dividends! The letter was given to the Club steward to be returned. Its contents were given to the whole Club. Society seized it greedily.

The next morning, the broker was surprised to have Robert Carson ushered into his private office.

"Ingalls, I've come to you for help."

The broker smiled his delight. "Want to invest?" he asked laughingly.

"No — not just now, at least. I want $5,000 for a few days. I have some investments to take care of — I don't care to have this loan mentioned. My securities — "

"Never mind that part of it, Mr. Carson. I'm only too happy to accommodate you."

He filled out a check, wondering as he did so, at the magnitude of the other's investments which $75,000 would not protect.

Carson put the check complacently in his flat book.

"And all because of an open letter dropped judiciously," he said to himself as he left the office.

For three days Robert Carson was not seen at the Club. When Dr. Haden was sent for, he left his other cases and went at once. At the top of the stairs, he met Mrs. Carson just leaving her husband's room. She turned and opened the door for him, watching eagerly as he made a hurried examination.

"Grip, Mrs. Carson, nothing more." His tone was cheery. "Not but what that's bad, but it could be worse."

He held the door open for her as she went out. Then he wrote a prescription. Robert Carson was watching him narrowly.

"I've got a favor to ask of you, Doctor. I've just made up my mind to ask it. I won't be able to get out for a day or two?"

"A week, Mr. Carson, if then." His listener frowned impatiently. The Doctor waited a moment.

"Your favor — if I can do anything — "

The man beside him hesitated a moment.

"I want $8,000, Doctor. I hate to ask this of you, but you see how I'm fixed. Can't make collections in bed, you know. My securities — "

"Don't mention them — am only too glad to be of service."

He filled out his check. As he left the house, he, too, thought of the seventy-five thousand quarterly dividends.

The Country Club's small dining-room was ablaze with lights. Its costliest glass and silver sparkled on the table. The fourteen men about the board were laughing noisily. Of all the dinners that Robert Carson had given, none had equalled this, which, strangely enough, he had given at the Club and to men only.

The dinner was nearly over, when they were suprised to see their host rise. He leaned forward, both hands on the table. Critically, coldly, he examined each face before him. A silence fell; each man felt uncomfortable.

"Gentlemen," he said slowly, "I have a question to ask you. I hope you will answer it honestly, odd as it is. It is this, — I came here a stranger six months ago, — a perfect stranger to you. I was unknown, unvouched for. I merely moved into a good house on your beautiful avenue. What was it you saw in me that should have won your goodwill, opened the doors of your homes to my wife and myself, showered your favors upon us? What was it, I ask you?"

There was an odd silence.

"Do not be afraid to tell the truth. We will doubtless never meet after tonight." A look of surprise flashed into each face. "We leave the city tomorrow morning. My question seems odd, — it *is* odd. Dr. Haden, you vouched for me, — what did you see in me?"

"*I* vouch for you, Mr. Carson — how?" Doubt, suspicion, surprise were mingled in the Doctor's face.

"You alone stood sponsor, Dr. Haden. Your wife was the first to call, you put up my name at the Club." There was a cold ring to his words. The Doctor flushed angrily; the others looked at him curiously.

"I have a story to tell you, gentlemen, that explains the oddity of my question." Surprise mingled with doubt in their minds.

"My coming here was an experiment. I had inherited twenty thousand dollars. For years I had been head waiter at Gerry's." His eyes narrowed to slits as he watched the expressions on the faces of his guests. The Hon. David Andrews half rose to his feet; then he sat down heavily.

"You scoundrel!" he breathed in bewilderment.

"My wife had also been employed there for some time. My manner, I presume, comes from my constant association with — gentlemen." He accented the last word pointedly. "I had learned many a bitter lesson in my contact with these same — gentlemen. I was made to feel that I was not only low, but, being in that position, was barely human. When we inherited this twenty thousand, I made up my mind to find out what it was that enabled a man to attain the position of those men, to attain the very position, in fact, that you have so kindly accorded me. I came here a stranger and hired the house I occupy. I made no representations, yet you know what you gave to me. Therefore I ask the question that I have." His voice had been keen and hard. As he finished, he smiled blandly. "So, gentlemen, answer me honestly, since this is our last meeting."

"It is not our last meeting, Robert Carson! By Heaven, I wonder if your very name is real!" The Hon. David Andrews had risen and was facing his host angrily. "You stay in this town — in this room, you damned rascal, until you make good that ten thousand I loaned you! You're a scoundrel, I tell you, a damned imposter! You made no representations, eh? What about your ancestry, your family silver, your college days, your connection with the Standard, eh? I'll — I'll — choke that ten thousand out of you with my own hands, you hear me — you — you *waiter?* Haden, bar that door," as Carson made a move as if to leave the room. "I won't be cheated! I'll telephone the police!"

"He shan't escape." Bernard Ingalls' voice quieted the tumult for an instant. "He's into me for five thousand. I've got a little something to say about this being our last meeting." Instantly, they left the table and crowded around the man who was calmly watching them.

One, only, kept his seat; he toyed musingly with his wineglass. Dr. Haden locked the door and put the key in his pocket. His face was white with anger.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "that man lies! I didn't vouch for him! I hope you won't attach any blame to me, — I, too, am a loser, — he got eight thousand out of me."

Frank Hunterdon, lawyer and millionaire, turned in his seat at the table.

"Haden, Andrews, all of you, come here and sit down. I guess we've all been done more or less, but hot words won't help us. That door locked, Haden? Then Carson can't escape, even if he should try to. Come back to the table, all of you, and let's see where we're at. First, — is there anyone here who hasn't loaned money to Mr. Carson?"

No one spoke. He took a pencil and card from his cardcase. "Now, just tell me in turn, each of you, how much you're out." He put down the figures. "With the amount I loaned, it's just a total of $68,000. Now, Carson, you've done us all, — trimmed us well — cleverly, I may say. The only queer thing about it to me is your giving yourself up to us, as it were, tonight. Why in blazes you didn't skip is what's puzzling me! That's your look-out, though, not mine. You've told your story, I'll answer your question. For some reason, damn it!" his gray eyes flashed, "I liked you! Your money didn't cut a cent's worth with me. I liked you because you seemed to be a *man!* Maybe I needed this lesson, guess I did or I wouldn't have learned it so easily. I've paid dear for it, but I think I've learned it well. As to the money part of it, as far as I'm concerned, take it and welcome. If your conscience can stand it, I guess my pocket can. You've given me many enjoyable evenings for my money. But I'd give double the amount you've worked me for to have you once more the man I thought you. You gentlemen can do what you like; I'm going."

He rose from the table. Robert Carson made a step toward him, then paused as Dr. Haden spoke:

"You're doing wrong, Hunterdon! Are you going to calmly sit still and let yourself be victimized? It's your duty — "

"Enough, Dr. Haden!" Robert Carson's voice rang with anger. "Mr. Hunterdon, will you kindly sit down? I'm going to finish the story I was telling when I was interrupted by that — that person." He looked at the Hon. David Andrews. "Mr. Andrews, who told you I was in the Standard?"

"I don't know's I'm obliged to tell, you — waiter!"

"Yes, you are, sir? Did I tell you?"

"No."

"Did Haden?"

"No."

"Did Ingalls?"

"Yes, he did!"

"Do you know how he got hold of that bit of information? Well, I'll tell you. I dropped that fake letter on the floor purposely. I thought I had Ingalls gauged right. There are people," he looked at the broker steadily, "who hesitate about reading other people's letters. I thought you wouldn't. Gentlemen," he leaned on the table as he stood by it, "I only partly told my story, and I told it as I did to see if, perhaps after all, I had misjudged some of you. One, — *one* out of fourteen, stood the test! I did not say I did not intend to pay you. Your minds, ruled as they are by the almighty dollar, could see no further than your pocketbooks. You jumped after the bait like a pack of dogs, and not a pedigreed pack, either. Now, I'll finish my story. I *was* at Gerry's; so was my wife, but I was not a waiter. I was manager, under Mr. Gerry. As to my college life, that's true. When I was a junior, my father died. I went home to Minneapolis. My father had lived a millionaire; I found that he had died without a cent, and in debt. I had a sister to support and those debts to pay. An old aunt bought in the family silver merely to save the plate. That money I used in settling some of the bills. I went to our friends. Those friends did not know me! I was desperate. I tried to get work at the little I could do. I failed. I left the city and worked on a farm. When winter came, I went to Chicago. My sister was sick. I beat my way to New York to an old friend of father's. *He* did not fail me, — he got me the position at Gerry's. My wife was in Mr. Gerry's private office. Her story was a repetition of my own, only a little worse. She had been driven, even as I had been. A year ago, the aunt of whom I spoke, died. Her fortune was divided between my sister and myself. I also got the family silver." He looked the Hon. David Andrews over slowly. "I took the twenty thousand and came here and I experimented. I made up my mind to see what society was really made of, — to have friends this time, and not fortune hunters. For the second time in my life, I have learned the value of society friends! Dr. Haden, will you unlock that door?"

"No, I won't! Do you think that pepper and snuff story is going to create such a sneeze that we will forget the $68,000 you've had of us?"

Robert Carson looked him over contemptuously.

"Dr. Haden, again you jump at conclusions. I said twenty thousand was your price. I didn't say it was mine. I inherited a million. Open that door!" His voice trembled with anger. The Doctor flung the key at him. He walked to the door and spoke to someone outside. His butler followed him as he again took his place at the table. The butler held a tray. On it were piles of banknotes done up in white bands and labelled.

"Take that to Dr. Haden, John, and — er — get a receipt, please."

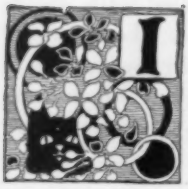
There was utter silence as the butler laid the bills in front of each man. Frank Hunterdon, lawyer and millionaire, was smiling as he held a glass of wine musingly between his eyes and the light. He started as a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Hunterdon," Robert Carson's voice trembled a little, "I'll not insult you by including you on my payroll tonight. I'll see you in the morning." He wrung the other's hand. "We're going South for a month or two. Then I want you to come out to us at Morristown; we've bought the old Chandler homestead there." He turned to the others coldly.

"Finish your dinner, — gentlemen — it's paid for."

In the Dark Scene.*

BY JOHN TRASK.



SHALL not tell you where nor at which of the operas it came to me — the strange experience which I have never told to anyone before and am telling now under a name which no one will ever recognize as mine. If you have heard the opera I refer to, perhaps you may remember it is one in which there is a dark scene. I had taken a box for the evening for two friends whom I had expected from out of town, college chums of Harvard days, — they and I were all three then bachelors of thirty-five, — and receiving word late in the afternoon that I was to be disappointed in the visit, had gone to the opera alone. I sat in the front of the box, having taken the chair that was at the end from which I could not only command the best view of the performance, but could, should necessity arise, most quickly reach the hall. Since an event some years before, a panic in a theatre at which I had been present, which had left a lasting impression on my mind, I had been as constantly alive to my surroundings in all such places as those who have passed through an episode like that I mention must ever after be. When, in the scene of which I speak, the lights in the great house went out, leaving us in total blackness, I was keenly, even nervously, alert; watchful, with the instincts common to all the great, silent mass around me, born of our being herded together, sightless and defenceless; and sensitive to every sound and movement, in addition, in a way in which few others were. Judge, therefore, of my start and chill when, with a sudden rustle beside me in the darkness, the arm that was nearest to the box next mine was brushed by a soft drapery, as of a woman's sleeve, and something hard and cold was dropped into my hand, resting, with palm upturned, upon the velvet curb. I closed, instinctively, on the object, which seemed, as it came in

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contact with my palm, to be a bracelet, and as instantly, instinctively, conversant with stories in which stealers of the priceless jewels worn by women at such places have so passed off a theft, detection being close upon them, slipped catlike from my place, into the brightly-lighted corridor outside. The person in the next box, he or she, could not have been more rapid than was I. The fact was physically impossible. The door of the box from which the hand had come, box 17, before which I took my stand with a feeling of grim satisfaction and surety, was closed, and the corridor stretched out to either side, long, empty, bright. At the instant that I left my chair the lights in the theatre had been flashed on, so that no one, however nimble, could have climbed from 17 into my box without being detected by the whole house and by me, and on the other side of 17 there was blank wall. On the other side of my box, 18, was again blank wall. Escape in any such way was cut off. No one, coming into my box, behind me, from the hall, to slip the thing into my hand, could have done so without letting in a flood of light. There was no box or balcony above me from which it could have come, even could it have fallen from above, this object which, accompanied by a touch the most elusive and yet most unmistakable, had been dropped with feather-lightness in my palm. It could have come only from the box next mine. I held the situation in my hand, as well as the bracelet, which, now opening it, I saw for the first time in the light.

To my surprise it was no marvel set with brilliants, but a simple thing, a plain gold hoop, such as women in more moderate circumstances than those who usually display their jewels in the boxes wear, a bracelet such as I had often seen upon a young girl's arm. The matter, I reasoned with myself, could not be one of robbery, then. The bracelet was not valuable enough. The motive with which it had been dropped into my palm — an accident by which an arm could have been stretched the necessary distance round the corner, so that the bracelet might slip off into my hand was quite incredible — could no doubt be ascertained, when the act was over, by an interview with the person, or the persons, in the box. In returning it the reason would appear, and the apologies of the fair culprit would no doubt be profuse. Perhaps a

college boy's dare to a college girl. One girl's dare to another. I had been young myself.

I waited, when the act was over, having kept my place outside the box, to see if the person or persons who were within would come out to join the promenaders who were straggling forth into the halls; and after a reasonable time, hearing no stir on the other side of the door that was between me and the solution of my mystery, knocked. There was no response, and I was then convinced that it had been a prank. I knocked again, and yet again, and after the third time, opened the door. What shall I say of my surprise—my more than surprise? There was no one in the box. I went in and examined it, beyond any shadow of a doubt. There was no one whatever in the box.

Slipping the unaccountable bracelet into my pocket I walked up and down the hall, staring, stupidly, at the numbers on the boxes, mine and the next. I was no believer in the supernatural. There was an explanation, I had always held, for everything. But how was this thing, in particular, to be explained?

"Will you kindly tell me," I inquired at the office, when the opera was out, "whether box 17 was occupied tonight?"

"Box 17 was not occupied this evening," replied the man behind the grate.

Was he certain, I asked. The man behind the grate was sure.

"I will take box 18 for a week," I said.

The matter absorbed all my thought for the remainder of the night and the next day, until, in fact, I found myself the next evening in the chair in the corner of the box that I had occupied the night before. The little plain gilt hoop, so suddenly, so utterly a mystery, had engirdled my whole world. The lights blinked in their accustomed way in the sconces set against the wall. The people in the crimson cells about me collected slowly and buzzed softly, as they had always done before. It was all natural—yet changed. I had been able to suggest no theory which would restore me, sitting dazed, in the well-known environment, to a sense of its reality. Of one thing only I was sure. The hand that had given me that bracelet on the night before had been a woman's hand. I had felt, as it brushed me, the fabric of her sleeve, the unmistakable, soft drapery of a woman richly dressed.

I do not know what I expected, and yet my heart beat high when I heard a rustle on the other side the thin partition between me and the box next mine, the elusive, silken rustle of a coat slipped off the shoulders of a woman richly gowned. There was a man's voice, following it, a guttural sound, such as belongs to a type of the male being from which I have always instinctively recoiled. I could not distinguish what he said. The woman did not speak at all. They, he and she, had been in the box but a moment when the curtain rose. I heard, not the voices from the stage, but the turning of their programmes, and the whisper of the man's voice now and then. I do not know, as I said, what I expected. The bracelet — which might be so remarkable a link between me and the woman, unseen although already all-engrossing, near me, — which could not belong to any woman who had not been in the box the night before, in some manner admitting of reasonable explanation, although as yet unexplained, to the senses, — and which was actually here, the tangible proof that a hand, some woman's hand, had put it into mine, — burned in my vest. And since — I burned with the absorbing question, — this woman, some woman, in a manner unexplained although of necessity explainable, in a way so secret and unusual, had given me the bracelet, what message thereby had she purposed to convey?

Why I should think that she who had put it into my hand would return I do not know. What could I know? I was but waiting for my clue. The mystery must of necessity contain a clue.

Before the curtain had gone down bringing the interval between the first and second acts, I slipped to my door and stood in readiness, enough in the shadow to be unobserved, or if observed, appearing to be waiting for someone who should join me in the promenade. There was a movement in the other box as of persons rising from their chairs. Almost a horror seized me. Were there really persons in the box? I had not realized how thoroughly the incident of the previous evening had unstrung me until I felt the force with which my hand laid hold upon the casing of the door. My forehead, in the instant that I stood and waited, had grown damp — but yes, they to whose motions I had been listening were coming out. I have been called preoccupied, abstracted, unobserving, but I took in, to the shimmer of the scarf that was

thrown about her shoulders, the woman who stood suddenly in the doorway next to mine. She was tall, blonde, wonderful, gowned in rose; one of those beings, seemingly of another race from well-known, daylight women, whom one cannot remember having seen except in all their glory, at night, in such a place. Her face was turned a little from me, toward the man behind her, whom I now saw too. Her shoulders, as she stood, were thrown into dazzling relief against his coat, her profile against his coarse dark hair, and I recoiled as something told me I should do when I first heard the mutter of his voice come through the wall. He was a satyr, a Caliban. His eyes were hideous, his smile a leer. They passed me, his evil face still drawing hers, as though, it seemed to me, by some fell fascination, her long scarf brushing me as it went by. That touch, that light, elusive touch upon my wrist! Did it not seem the same?

I fancied — who shall say what I fancied as I stood with whirling head, looking after the woman between whom and myself, as I have said, there might be or might not be so remarkable a link, as she passed down the hall with the man beside her, and on into the foyer, disappearing in the throng beyond, among its twinkling lights. I fancied that I had noted fear in her proud bearing, in her eyes upturned to his. I noted that she wore no jewels on her arms. This man, this evil-seeming influence beside her, did I see in him her need of a defender, some reason for a token to me, a knight errant, to look into the matter further, to come to her relief? Yet by what human agency, if so, had they, or she, or anyone, been in the box last night?

I waited, still withdrawn into the shadow, until she returned, hearing, with quickenings of romance and adventure such as I had never known, the rustle of her gown along the hall. She passed, a tall, ethereal vision, into 17, and if she saw me she gave no sign. The man gave me a glance in which I read that he had noticed me before. I heard him speak to her as they took their seats, the guttural, muttering sound.

They did not come out again until the opera was over. When they came — was it by accident? — he with his gloves half-drawn upon his long, white, evil-looking hands, she in her long, white opera-coat, she paused an instant, as though through a thought

that she had found herself without her gloves, her programme, so that she fell a step behind, and our glances met. My hand went to the place above the bracelet in my vest. My eyes — there was but the instant — asked her, "Is it yours?" I could not read her face. The dark man looked around and at the same time she looked away. For a moment it seemed to me as though he meant to speak. When I looked for them in the foyer, having followed as quickly as I thought was prudent, they were gone.

The next day dragged by as though held back by leaden weights The next night found me, feverish, in my place. I, who had been a bookworm, a recluse, a savant, was transformed, changed in a day, to a cavalier, a gallant, as hot for chivalry and intrigue as any knight of mediæval times. Would she, the lady gowned in rose, be there again?

I waited, breathless, and during the first strains of the overture I heard it — the rustle and the sound of soft steps that I had been expecting. The undetermined movements on the other side the wall, as of persons settling themselves in their seats, the opera having begun, soon gave place to silence.

Who shall say with what impatience — the opera of each succeeding night seemed longer, — I waited for the first entr'acte. Who shall say with what feelings of conflicting interest and emotion I beheld, instead of her whom, having no sane reason to expect, I still expected, another woman, gowned in green, emerge from the door next to mine. She was as young, as wonderful, and more alluring than the other, with heavy, braided coils of golden red about her high-bred face, whose beauty and whose sadness smote me like a dart. Behind her, older, no less beautiful, there suddenly appeared another woman, whose personality, powerful, insistent, and yet to me with all its perfectness repellent, seemed, just as the jewels on her bosom took to themselves the sparkle from the sconces, when it placed itself beside the girl's to take away her light. Was she, this younger woman with the lily face, laboring beneath some secret thrall? Was it between me and *her* there was the link? That touch that had come to me in the dark — was it her touch? And if so, if so — how? I only knew that as she passed me, drooping, beside the other woman, my loyalty was hers. I waited as I had done before, as she was lost to me among the

brilliant throng of promenaders in the foyer, until, knowing that in due time she must do so, she returned. Some one of the old masters, I thought, should have immortalized her hair. For a moment, a single instant, as she stepped aside to let the older woman pass into the box, our eyes encountered, and mine asked hers "Is it *yours?*" She looked at me a moment, with what meaning I could not interpret, and disappeared into the box. The opportunity, although I sought it until the opera was over, did not occur again.

That was the second night, and on the third there came the woman gowned in black, whom I shall not describe, because that which drew me to her, held me with surpassing fascination, was not that which could be described. I could not read the name of the appeal I saw in her dark eyes, but never yet, it seemed to me, was need more deeply written on a face; a face more haunted and haunting than was hers. She was surrounded by a crowd of fawning men and envying women, who, with her, passed me in the corridor, and she seemed to interpose her laughter and her wit between herself and them as though she held a mask between their faces and her own. There was but one thought in me as I watched her — the hope that, however she had done it, it was she. The mirth of the vapid throng around her came to me through the wall. As they went by my door for the last time, when the opera was over, she was nearest me, and the gardenia she carried — could it have been by accident? — as her black gown passed me, dropped from her hand, at my feet. Quickly as thought, as she looked back at me, I stooped to pick it up, and it was not of the flower I spoke when I asked her, in words, "Is it yours?" The vapid man who was next her thrust himself between us and she was swept away.

She, like the others, did not come again. From that night a veritable madness seized me. I took the box for a month, for the season. I was there at the opera each night, with the bracelet. It compelled me thither. I felt that until the manner and the meaning of my possession of it were explained I could not again be sane. I was unable to believe that she who was the woman of the mystery would not at some time return. Never yet had man before him a more dazzlingly succeeding pageant of beauty of all types, of robes of every tint and fabric and description, of jewels

of all lustres, of voices of all tones, of personalities of all degrees of charm. Never yet had poet such a dream of Fair Women as had I. I was thrilled each night to be thrilled anew upon the morrow. I walked, dazed, through my days, one hour in them alone having any meaning — that which found me at the opera; one place — my chair in the corner of the box, next 17. There and then, alone, did circumstances around me hold significance, the lightest whisper, faintest movement in the crimson cell beside me outweighing all the business of the streets outside. Judge, therefore, of my state of mind when, entering the box one evening, I saw a folded slip of paper on the cushion of my chair. My hands trembled so that I could hardly pick it up. I crushed it in my palm, fearing lest anyone should know of its existence and with the feeling that someone would try to take it from me. The acting on the stage passed in a blur before my eyes, the voices rang in shrieking discord in my ears. Did the note contain the answer to the mystery at last?

I was unable to open it until the act was nearly over, holding it like a thief in the hollow of my palm. It was a note from the management informing me that the box, which I had taken for the season, would be re-rented at the beginning of the following week. The management was sorry, etc., very sorry that my occupancy of it should require to be discontinued — but there had been complaints.

I sought the box-office, but was able to accomplish nothing. I went to the manager. I found him a quiet, heavy man, whom all my indignation and excitement did not move. I was obliged, since it was my only hope, absolutely necessary to me, of ever finding out the answer to my enigma, to tell him the story of the mystery and show him the bracelet that had been dropped into my palm. He listened, looking at the bracelet I had put into his hand, with a strange expression on his face.

"Will you show me," he said at length, "exactly where you sat when this occurred?"

Together we went up through the great, deserted house, our footsteps making hollow echoes along the corridors and stairs. The manager had given an order to leave on the lights. We came together into box 18.

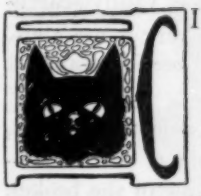
"It was here," I told him, "in this corner. Exactly where I am sitting now!" I took my place in the chair that I had come to know so well. "My hand was lying, open, palm up, on the rail, as it is lying now." I laid it there, as it had lain, palm upward, in that memorable scene. The manager nodded as he watched.

"Will you close your eyes?" he said, and I obeyed. He stepped up behind me — I felt the motion; there was a movement of his arm, and again there was that soft, light, unmistakable, elusive touch upon my wrist, as of the fabric of a woman's sleeve; that touch that had so nearly, so well-nigh made me mad! I grasped at it, springing from my seat. The manager was there behind me. Was he conjurer — or fiend? There was a demoniacal expression on his face.

He gently gathered back the velvet welt that had bound in the folds, slightly loosened, of the short fringed curtain at the corner of the box, and slipping the bracelet round it, pushed it into place beside its fellow, a handsome little plated circlet hidden in the rich drapery heretofore, — and you will understand why it is I do not wish that anyone should recognize my name. Some nervous movement of mine, in the dark scene, had slightly disarranged the drapery, loosening the strap that had dropped the circlet in my hand. The only excuse that I can offer is that I had been a bookworm, a recluse, a miserable savant. It was the curtain-ring!

A Lizard's Love.*

BY WALTER F. McENTIRE.



CIRCUMSTANCES made Herbert Tuttle manager of a mill near a small town in Colorado. For some years prior to his coming it had not been in operation, and he had not been long in charge before he determined upon numerous necessary improvements. Meantime, he had gathered about him a set of bright young fellows as assistants in the laboratory. It was during that season of the year, in the glorious climate of Colorado, when all nature is glad, and his assistants were in the habit of eating their noon-day lunch in the open, between the laboratory building and the mill.

One day the manager's attention was attracted by the voices of the men, calling as if to some household pet, and he was surprised to discover that they were feeding with crumbs a beautiful lizard, some six inches in length, of a light green color, dotted with black. As Tuttle watched the proceedings, he observed that the little animal was very intelligent. Scampering away with a portion of the food, it would dart into the crevices of the rocks forming the area-way around a cellar window of the mill, and then, returning, would eat a few crumbs, and lightly depart with others. The lizard continued his pretty performance as long as the crumbs were thrown, and Tuttle concluded that in his trips to the rocks he was visiting his home, carrying food to his mate, as he had been coming out each noon for several weeks.

Not long afterwards, in the course of the improvements, it became necessary to tear up the area-way around the cellar window, and the manager himself chanced that way while the work was in progress, his notice being called by an Italian laborer to the actions of the evicted lizard. It was frantically running about in

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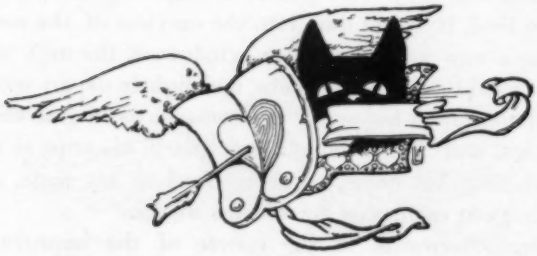
every direction, around the place that once, no doubt, had been his happy home.

"Too-a-bad!" exclaimed the man, noting Tuttle's interest in the matter. "Breaka da lizard house, killa his wife; — lizard crazy!"

And such, indeed, was the case. Unintentionally, the lizard's house had been destroyed and his mate at the same time. With renewed interest Tuttle watched the poor creature, vainly searching the wreck of his former dwelling. With every sense alert, peering, feeling and smelling at every crevice, the bereaved animal kept up its fruitless quest.

It was his final search. At last he crawled dejectedly away, flashing for a moment a brilliant emerald in a band of golden sunlight, and then fading to a dusky gray in the shadow of the broken wall. Suddenly, almost before the onlooker realized what he saw, the little creature deliberately threw himself into the water of a drain near by. When its body was recovered, the beautiful lizard was dead. Driven to distraction by the loss of his mate, he had drowned himself. He had died for love. And why should not a lizard die for love?



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